

the wave by xxcaribbean

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Summary:

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Author's Note:

instead of studying for my test like i should've, i wrote this mess instead. cuz ya know, priorities and stuff, lmao. luckily i passed tho so today's been a win.

Cumbersome is the weight of a heavy heart, much like the reflection of his face in the mirror. What was once a solid vision is now nothing but warped fragments of glass, split down a road of cracks, tiny pieces clinking onto the porcelain of the sink below while others find refuge as embedded slivers across his knuckles.

It's much easier this way, to be addicted to pain when everything else is numb. He thinks maybe this is why he lashes out, why anger erupts like a volcano and damages everything in its vicinity. But the instinctive curl of his lip reminds him that no excuse will save him from the depths of hell he'd dug himself into.

And boy did he fucking dig.

It's a miracle he's lasted this long, with too much pride and too much abandonment constantly squeezing him senseless. And yet, there's not an ounce of forgiveness for himself; most often, it feels like he'd been born with a devil on his shoulder.

With a reckless tide still lingering on the shores of his heart rather than retreating into the ocean like it ought to, he hisses deeply as he runs the water over his bleeding hand. It hurts, but in a good way, stinging the open flesh and washing it free like the broken glass was never there to begin with.

There will be hell to pay for his damages, another long moment frozen in time, the tick of the clock the only window of distraction while his face and his body succumbs to ridicule at the hand of another.

His heart squeezes painfully in his chest at the thought, feels the tears

at the corner of his eyes, but Billy refuses to let them fall. He won't let himself do that again, shed any more tears for a man who doesn't deserve that much, if anything at all.

As if he deserves that much either.

Licking the front of his teeth, he shuts off the water and forgoes any medicine that might dull the ache he's brought upon himself. One would think he'd have an aversion to it, that itching growth of discomfort rotting down to the bone, but he doesn't. It makes him feel like nothing else, a high discovered too young, a friend in times of great need.

Well, that's what he likes to make himself believe.

And it proves true when Billy picks up on the footsteps looming like thunder, dragging soles against the grain of the floor. Panic first, accidentally sees it in what's left of the mirror before he shuts that straight down. It's a hell of a lot easier to deny the emotions that rage inside of him than it is to take comfort in what they could mean, that some things aren't entirely his fault. Though, that certainly doesn't stop the steps from drawing nearer.

Breathing deeply, Billy schools his face and lets everything settle, an absurd calmness perfected.

In the end, he'll realize there wasn't a need, but the titillating moment of opening the door and knowing who he might find behind it is pure agony all the same.

Billy opens the door only to be met by a munchkin of a girl with rust colored hair, and once again, the tears sting but do not fall. He breathes again, struggling, but the muscles in his shoulder don't relax like they ought to. It's not Max's fault. It's never been her fault for falling into a family he wishes he could've saved her from. The torment they all bear in this house and the many others they previously lived in, weighs them all down.

And if there's one thing Billy can admit to himself, is that the fire within Max has not yet been extinguished. No matter his selfish behavior and his attempt to protect, she's stood strong, and he's glad

there's at least one thing he's not responsible for breaking. Scarred? Yes, and only time may heal those wounds, but for now, it's enough; it'll have to be enough.

"Steve's here," she says plainly, like she can't be bothered to give him much more than a wary attitude, all perfectly understandable and something they're both still healing from.

Relief comes running, a slight annoyance, but relief nonetheless. He'd asked Steve never to show his face around here if he could help it, but it seems the daredevil got wind that his parents were out of town for the night. A reprieve that won't last long but welcomed all the same.

Billy makes the mistake of scratching his jaw after that, gives a muffled, "thanks," with every intention of finding Steve and getting the fuck out of here.

But Max's voice drifts through, eyes locking on his busted hand, droplets of blood still building behind scabbing wounds. "What the fuck happened?"

"Language," he says roughly, though he hardly means it. There's much worse she could be doing than ringing out dirt-covered words.

"Did you-" she starts, but quickly closes her mouth when Billy arches a brow. He's not laid a hand on a single person since that night, kept his promise like he said he would.

"It's nothing," he says, though the lie feels like cotton on his tongue. "Don't worry about it."

She huffs, annoyed that he won't tell her despite the fact he knows she'll discover the evidence soon enough. There will be no need for exposing his true transgressions, and in all honesty, he doesn't want her afraid of him again. But sometimes, sometimes everything is a little too much, like his reflection in the mirror or how trapped he feels despite the fact that if he really wanted, he could leave and never look back.

But what would that mean for Max, for his stepmother, for this house

that had every ounce of potential to burn to the ground?

The silence reigns between them, but only for a minute. There are more footsteps, and while Billy notices the ease in Max's shoulders, it doesn't stop him from coiling up tight again, much like a snake ready to bite.

"Everything okay?" comes the voice first before Steve appears around the corner. He pauses to glance between them, not sure of what he's walked into and uncertain of asking out loud.

Billy just blinks at him, at first, not registering the fact that Steve, *Steve* of all people is in his house for the first time since they started this.... thing between them. There are no labels, not yet, and Max sure as shit knows; it's probably why she's smirking rather than glaring, but Billy hardly processes it, has half a mind to send Steve away from so many tainted walls and the smell of misery that lingers in this house.

Steve's too good for this.

"It's okay," Max replies, glancing up at Billy for a quick second before turning her back on them. Her room isn't far, and Billy suspects she'll spend her evening debating on whether she should kick it or leave for another new adventure. "Just don't stay out late."

He doesn't realize it until it happens, but a laugh, small and hardly noticeable, makes its way past Billy's lips. He's caught in Steve's gaze, warmth taking hold of him now rather than any fear he'd previously had, and it's welcome. No matter how much he'd like to berate Steve for showing up, he won't because Billy realizes that maybe this is exactly what he needed.

"We're putting Neosporin on that."

And then he's scowling. "Fuck you, it's fine," he replies without any heat behind the words. Steve will absolutely find some and apply it; there's no questioning that, and Billy will absolutely let him do it.

Steve grins, though, lazily as he waits for Billy to draw closer. This time, it's his steps that hum throughout a near-empty house,

stumbling across the realization that Steve is *actually* here. He'd come looking for Billy, specifically, risked showing up at his door just for the sake of it. "You got a death wish or something?"

That grin only gets wider on Steve's lips, simply shrugging with, "you've no idea."

Curiouser and curiouser; it makes Billy wonder. He doesn't pry, though, just like Steve doesn't request more than Billy is ready to let on. But maybe one day he'll share, and the excitement that filters through his chest is still so new, Billy often doesn't know what to make of it, carefully hesitant but interesting all the same.

"I'm glad you're here," he says instead, gently pulling at the collar of Steve's jacket. It's a little frayed at the edges, and it's most certainly too preppy for Billy's liking, but it fits Steve nicely, brings out the flush in his skin. It's a good feeling knowing that some things haven't changed; the prep in him hasn't left, glistening behind a new growth of self-assurance in such a way Billy doesn't remember Steve having when they'd first met. Now, it shows without apology, and he knows it had nothing to do with him.

It makes him proud.

"You ready?" Steve prompts, though he's not said where he wants to go. The sad thing is, Billy will follow anyway. He'd follow Steve anywhere he'd ask him to if it meant they were in the same orbit.

There's a gentleness in the air now, like soft pine trees blowing in the breeze. While eerily quiet, the house doesn't feel so heavy like it once did, and Billy's nearly forgotten what he'd done to his hand, to the mirror, and how scarred his heart has become. Too often he's licked his wounds by himself, made easier with time and reassurance that he could always pick himself back up on his own. But there's something here, a poignant feeling tracing the lines of an angry cloud that had settled over the roof the moment Billy and his family walked through the door.

Little by little, it's like the clouds part, and while he's standing in one of the most vain places he's ever known, it doesn't feel so suffocating as he's used to.

Temporarily, he thinks, but as he nudges the underside of Steve's jaw with calloused fingers and a slight shake, Billy allows himself that *what if*. Unintended as it may be, as most things don't ever go according to plan, he knows that sometimes that's okay. It's learning that surprises can be good things, and who would he be if he completely filtered out the impulsiveness that's kept them both on their toes?

"I'm gonna kiss you now," he says, watching the surprise cross Steve's face, wholly welcomed as Billy pulls him in, tasting Steve in a warped dimension where things have been righted, and he's not standing on floorboards that have witnessed too much spilled blood.

Slow and chaste, but warm and sweet like wine upon their lips, Billy allows himself to curl his fingers into Steve's jacket. Doesn't dwell on much else as Steve moans into his mouth.

He's also the first to pull away, red lips and breathless, but this feeling? This one that's worked its way deep down inside of him, makes him feel alive for the first time in a long time; much more than his fist marrying glass or the twist in his gut after a slew of bitter words. The thrill of the *fuck you* behind his teeth, images of his father watching with rage and displeasure, fester in all the right places. The sick thrill of pissing off a man who'd done more wrong than right in his entire goddamn life.

There's fire in Billy's eyes when he blinks, like a self-fulfilling prophecy etched into the white, full of decisions and determination that won't lead him astray anymore.

Steve nudges him, narrowing his eyes with intrigue until it's Billy's turn to smirk something mischievous. "You make me feel too damn brave."

The words are out onto the air before he can stop them, and it's not like Billy would take them back anyway. Though before Steve can reply, before Billy even lets him open his mouth, he's knocking shoulders with him as he passes, an attempt at playful and a direct plea for his momentarily cracked guard to remain unquestioned.

Billy heads to the front of the house with Steve just on his tail, and

while their dynamic isn't entirely defined, whatever just transpired is one for the books.

Books Billy is willing to reopen the next time this house trembles with too much rage, a secret best kept between his heart and his mind. Satisfaction at it's finest because now? Now Billy has something worthwhile, and there's nothing here that can take that away.